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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet presents an overview of current and projected changes in American family life, along with implications of those changes for home economics educators. Topics which are covered include: (1) changing family structures; (2) working women and homemakers; (3) family problems such as divorce, adolescent sexuality and pregnancy, violence and neglect, and narcissism; (4) the need for child care and child development programs; (5) consumer education with an emphasis on responsible consumption and energy conservation; (6) home management, especially money management; (7) social and psychological effects of the household environment on family members and the use of the home as a learning center; (8) nutrition and food; and (9) economic, social, and psychological concerns related to textiles and clothing. A bibliography is included which cites three resources, one of which is available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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The Future of Family Life.

OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 13.

by

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FACT SHEET No.13

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

THE FUTURE OF FAMILY LIFE

Introduction. Undoubtedly, the family of tomorrow will differ in many ways from the family of today. Due to the changing perceptions of men and women of their roles in raising a family, economic conditions, legislative influences, and technology, tomorrow's family will be a different entity. It is the responsibility of home economics educators to prepare the parents of the future for these changes. The changes will encompass child care and development, consumer education, home management, housing and home furnishing, nutrition and food, and textiles and clothing.

Family Life. The American family is a continuing, but changing, social unit. According to a recent national poll nearly half of the respondents felt that family life has deteriorated. They also expressed worry about the future. However, most respondents still considered family life the most important part of their lives. Family life today is characterized by diversity of form and more varied individual roles of family members. These include—

- single parent families,
- families consisting of a husband and wife with no children,
- families consisting of parents and an only child,
- single person families—a household consisting of one person living alone,
- unmarried couples living together,
- alternative family forms—such as homosexual and communal family arrangements.

Working Women. In the past eight years, polls have recorded a dramatic change in the woman's life role.

- In half of U.S. marriages, both husband and wife work for pay outside the home.
- Four out of ten women who are presently high school students will become heads of families and will be the sole support of themselves and their children.
- More women than men are in clerical jobs.
- More men than women are in skilled craft jobs.
- More women than men are employed as service workers.

Other concerns are that (1) in today's inflated economy, homemakers receive no monetary payment for working in the home, although replacing them with outside domestic help could cost up to $40,000 per year, and (2) when a homemaker is "displaced," she is suddenly without a means of support or a means of making money and is cast into the work force.

FAMILY PROBLEMS

Areas of conflict within a family become the concern of the home economics educator, who must help students deal with problems both in their present home and in the home they will someday help create. These include—

- divorce and its effects on the marital partners and the children,
- adolescent sexuality and teenage pregnancy,
- violence and neglect in families, including abuse of children and the elderly,
- narcissism—that is, a preoccupation with self which results in the "me first" attitude.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

Today's major concerns in the area of child care and development center around alternative child care arrangements (a need that has been sparked by increasing rates of single parenthood and maternal employment), the effectiveness of various types of early childhood development programs, the effects of the narcissistic American social scene of families, and the role of parents versus the experts in matters of child care.

In general, the effects of day care on the mother-child bond remain unknown. Research purporting to show home care/day care differences in children's attachments to their mothers is at best contradictory. Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Lawton 1978) on the effects of day care upon the intellectual development of the child have led investigators to the conclusion that a formal, structured, early childhood educational program enhances intellectual development to a greater extent than an informal, open framework program.

CONSUMER EDUCATION

Perhaps in no other area, save that concerned with family relationships, has there been so much change or development, with such far-reaching implications for families and for education, as in the area of consumer education. Today's consumer is making consumption decisions in an era characterized by inflation, materials shortages, pollution problems, energy crises, unprecedented government regulation, and a developing ethic of resource conservation and environmental protection. The "postindustrial age consumer," who will reach adulthood sometime in the nineties, is concerned primarily with efficient and responsible consumption.

Problems of energy shortages and energy conservation should be given emphasis in consumer education. Methods of saving energy in the home are appropriate content for consumer and homemaking education programs.

HOME MANAGEMENT

There are many concerns in the area of home management, but none are as vital as money management. With today's fast pace of inflation, budgeting has never been so important and so difficult. Winter (1980) suggests three broad alternatives for families to consider in planning for desired goals that call for monetary resources:

- Attempt to increase the amount of resources devoted to attaining the goal

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- Establish standards that adequately reconcile the goal to the level of resources available
- Abandon the goal

Computers may be the next major appliance for year-round record maintenance, checkbook balancing, budgeting, and utilization of investment information. The computer as an aid in home management merits further study by home economists. A number of specialists in home management have suggested a need for greater simplicity in lifestyles for the coming decades. This need will arise because of continuing resource scarcity, fluctuating resource distribution, inflation, demographic changes, and changing family goals.

HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS

Despite the fact that all families are not equally influenced by their environment, many factors are (or are assumed to be) related to the mental health created by housing. These include structural factors such as the proportion and size of the dwelling, the external setting, internal features of the dwelling such as room arrangement, characteristics, and contents, and the arrangement and location of communities.

The household environment has important social and psychological effects upon family members, not only because of the influence of spatial arrangements, but also because such spatial arrangements influence social encounters. In particular, consideration should be given to those elements in the home environment that meet the need of children to move, to feel comfortable, and to feel competent. Housing needs for elderly members of the family are another important consideration. These needs center around safety, convenience, stimulation of interest in life, and provision for independence.

The following is a list of basic concepts in regard to the home as a potential learning center:

- Home-based educational programs could be designed to reach young children who are developing concepts of work, leisure, and occupational possibilities; to provide for training and retraining of students and homemakers; and to help the older worker find new career directions.
- Home-based educational programs could also improve family communication regarding learning opportunities and experiences.
- Home study by the parent creates a role model of the parent as a "learning person."

NUTRITION AND FOOD

In the area of nutrition and food, research continuously yields new information on subjects such as the relationship between diet and degenerative disease, or the interactions between nutrients and other aspects of our environment. Consumer strategies for buying food in a nutritionally competent manner should continue to be stressed: for example, learning about product labeling, realizing the "hidden content" of prepared entrees, and being aware of the psychological effect of food advertising.

TEXTILES AND CLOTHING

Attention should be given not only to the economic factors related to clothing, but also to the social and psychological aspects of dress. In teaching for selection, comfort properties of textiles and clothing, fabric flammability, and properties of various fibers are appropriate areas of content. Students should be made aware of energy considerations involved in home care of clothing: for example, the relative energy demands in the care of polyester and cotton fabrics. Through such instruction, means for the conserving of energy in clothing maintenance may also be taught. Since there has been a resurgence of interest in the arts of hand weaving, textile printing, and other surface design techniques, textile arts should perhaps be introduced at the secondary level and given a more significant role at the postsecondary levels. The skills of sewing and garment construction may more properly be included in wage-earning programs in the clothing and textiles area than in modern consumer and homemaking education focused on family needs. But as inflated prices of clothing may make sewing a helpful means of coping with increased costs, clothing construction may be included as an elective course.

REFERENCES

This overview is based on information from the following work:

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OTHER RESOURCES

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This Fact Sheet was developed by Catherine Thompson, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Editor: Juliet Miller. Orders for National Center Publications should be sent to the Publications Office, Box E. Or call 614-486-3655/800-848-4815.

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